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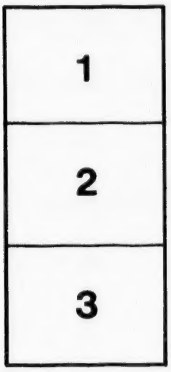

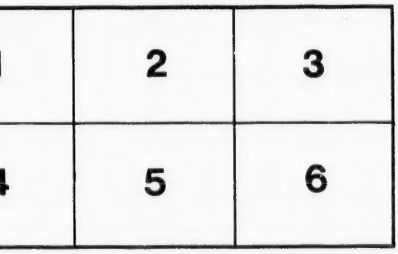

From THE INDEPENDENT, New York, August 4th, 1899.

THE WHITE GULL.

FOR THE CENTENARY OF THE BIRTH OF SHELLEY, AUG. 4TH, 1892.

BY BLISS CARMAN.

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I.

UP by the idling reef-set bell
The tide comes in;
And to the idle heart to-day
The wind has many things to say;
The sea has many a tale to tell
His younger kin.

For we are his, bone of his bone,
Breath of his breath;
The doom tides sway us at their will;
The sky of being rounds us still;
And over us at last is blown
The wind of death.

II.

A hundred years ago to-day
There came a soul,
A pilgrim of the perilous light,
Treading the spheral paths of night,
On whom the word and vision lay
With dread control.

Now the pale Summer lingers near,
And talks to me
Of all her wayward journeyings
And the old sweet forgotten things
She loved and lost and dreamed of here
By the blue sea.

The great cloud-navies one by one
Bend sails and fill
From ports below the round sea-verge;
I watch them gather and emerge
And steer for havens of the sun
Beyond the hill.

The gray sea-horses troop and roam;
The shadows fly
Along the wind-floor at their heels;
And where the golden daylight wheels,
A white gull searches the blue dome
With keening cry.

And something, Shelley, like thy fame
Dares the wide morn
In that sea-rover's glimmering flight,
As if the Northland and the night
Should hear thy splendid bugling name
Put scorn to scorn.

III.

Thou heart of all the hearts of men,
Tameless and free
And vague as that marsh-wandering fire,
Leading the world's outworn desire
A night march down this ghostly fen
From sea to sea!

Through this divided camp of dream
Thy feet have passed,
As one who should set hand to rouse

V.

I think thou must have wandered far
With Spring for guide,
And heard the shy-born forest flowers
Talk to the wind among the showers;
Through sudden doorways left ajar
When the wind sighed

Thou must have heard the marching sweep
Of blown white rain
Go volleying up the icy kills,—
And watched with Summer when the hills
Muttered of freedom in their sleep
And slept again.

Surely thou wert a lonely one,
Gentle and wild;
And the round sun delayed for thee
In the red moorlands by the sea,
When Tyrian Autumn lured thee on,
A wistful child,

To rove the tranquil, vacant year,
From dale to dale;
And the great Mother took thy face
Between her hands for one long gaze,
And bade thee follow without fear
The endless trail.

And thy clear spirit, half forlorn,
Seeking its own,
Dwelt with the nomad tents of rain,
Marched with the gold-red ranks of grain,
Or ranged the frontiers of the morn,
And was alone.

VI.

One brief perturbed and glorious day!
How couldst thou learn
The quiet of the forest sun,
Where the dark whispering rivers run
The journey that hath no delay
And no return?

And yet within thee flamed and sang
The dauntless heart,
Knowing all passion and the pain
On man's imperious disdain,
Since God's great part in thee gave pang
To earth's frail part.

It held the voices of the hills
Deep in its core;
The wandering shadows of the sea
Called to it,—would not let it be;
The harvest of those barren rills
Was in its store.

Thine was a love that strives and calls
Outcast from home,
Burning to free the soul of man
With some new life. How strange, a ban
Should set thy sleep beneath the walls
Of changeless Rome!

VII.

More soft, I deem, from spring to spring,
Thy sleep would be
Where this far western headland lies
With its imperial azure skies,
Under thee hearing beat and swing
The eternal sea.

Where all the livelong brooding day
And all night long,
The far sea-journeying wind should come

Thou heart of all the hearts of men,
Tameless and free
And vague as that marsh-wandering fire,
Leading the world's outworn desire
A night march down this ghostly fen
From sea to sea!

Through this divided camp of dream
Thy feet have passed,
As one who should set hand to rouse
His comrades from their heavy drowse;
For only their own deeds redeem
God's sons at last.

But the dim world will dream and sleep
Beneath thy hand,
As poppies in the windy morn,
Or valleys where the standing corn
Whispers when One goes forth to reap
The weary land.

O captain of the rebel host,
Lead forth and far!
Thy toiling troopers of the night
Press on the unavailing fight;
The somber field is not yet lost,
With thee for star.

Thy lips have set the hail and haste
Of clarions free
To bugle down the wintry verge
Of time forever, where the surge
Thunders and crumbles on a waste
And open sea.

IV.

Did the cold Norns who pattern life
With haste and rest
Take thought to cheer their pilgrims on
Through trackless twilights vast and wan,
Across the failure and the strife,
From quest to quest,—

Set their last kiss upon thy face,
And let thee go
To tell the haunted whisperings
Of unimaginable things,
Which plague thy fellows with a trace
They cannot know?

So they might fashion and send forth
Their house of doom,
Through the pale splendor of the night,
In vibrant hurled impetuous flight,
A resonant meteor of the North
From gloom to gloom.

More soft, I deem, from spring to spring,
Thy sleep would be
Where this far western headland lies
With its imperial azure skies,
Under thee hearing beat and swing
The eternal sea.

Where all the livelong brooding day
And all night long,
The far sea-journeying wind should come
Down to the doorway of thy home,
To lure thee ever the old way
With the old song.

But the dim forest would so house
Thy heart so dear,
Even the low surf of the rain
Where ghostly centuries complain,
Might beat against thy door and rouse
No heartache here.

For here the thrushes, calm, supreme,
Forever reign,
Whose glorious kingly golden throats
Regather their forgotten notes
In keys where lurk no ruin of dream,
No tinge of pain.

And here the ruthless noisy sea,
With the tide's will,
The strong gray wrestler, should in vain
Put forth his hand on thee again—
Lift up his voice and call to thee,
And thou be still.

For thou hast overcome at last;
And fate and fear
And strife and rumor now no more
Vex thee by any wind-vexed shore,
Down the strewn ways thy feet have passed
Far, far from here.

VIII.

Up by the idling, idling bell
The tide comes in;
And to the restless heart to-day
The wind has many things to say;
The sea has many a tale to tell
His younger kin.

The gray sea-horses troop and roam;
The shadows fly
Along the wind-floor at their heels;
And where the golden daylight wheels,
A white gull searches the blue dome
With keening cry.

NEW YORK CITY.

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